The Measure of Admonishment

A Practical Guide to Self-Reflection from the *Anumānasutta*

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The Paradox of Wanting to Grow, But Being Unable to Listen

The Anumānasutta begins with a challenge: “Suppose a mendicant invites other mendicants to admonish them. But they’re hard to admonish, admonish, having qualities that make them hard to admonish. They’re impatient, and don’t take instruction respectfully.”

So their spiritual companions don’t think it’s worth advising and instructing them, and that individual doesn’t gain their trust.

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What Qualities Obscure Our Self-Reflection?

The sutta identifies 16 specific qualities that make a person difficult to admonish. These can be understood as patterns of Ego, Anger, Defensiveness, and Rigidity.

Ego & Desire
Corrupt wishes; glorifying oneself and putting others down.

Defensiveness & Evasion
Objecting to, rebuking, or retorting to an accuser; dodging the issue and displaying annoyance, hate, or bitterness; being unable to account for evidence.

Anger & Reactivity
Being irritable and overcome by anger; being acrimonious, stubborn, or blurting out words bordering on anger.

Contempt & Deceit
Being offensive, contemptuous, jealous, stingy, devious, or deceitful.

Rigidity
Being obstinate, arrogant, or attached to one's own views, holding them tight and refusing to let go.

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The Qualities that Create a Clear Reflection

The path to growth opens when we are receptive. A person who is "easy to admonish" possesses qualities that are the direct inverse of the obstructive ones.

"Suppose a mendicant doesn't invite other mendicants to admonish them. But they're easy to admonish, having qualities that make them easy to admonish. They're accepting, and take instruction respectfully."

- They do not have corrupt wishes.
- They are not attached to their own views, not holding them tight, but letting them go easily.

So their spiritual companions think it's worth advising and instructing them, and that individual gains their trust.

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The First Step: Measuring by Inference.

The sutta proposes a method to see ourselves as others might see us. It begins not with self-judgment, but with observing our reactions to others.

1. Observe
Notice a quality in another person that you dislike or disapprove of.
Example: “This individual has corrupt wishes… And I don’t like or approve of this individual.”

2. Universalize
Recognize that if you possessed this same quality, others would likely dislike or disapprove of you.
Example: “And if I were to fall under the sway of corrupt wishes, others wouldn’t like or approve of me.”

3. Resolve
Form the intention to avoid that quality in yourself.
Example: “A mendicant who knows this should give rise to the thought: ‘I will not fall under the sway of corrupt wishes.’”

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Applying the Method: The Case of Rigid Views.

The technique can be applied to any of the 16 qualities. Consider the trait of being rigidly attached to one's own opinions.

Observe: "This individual is attached to their own views, holding them tight and refusing to let go. And I don't like or approve of this individual."

Universalize: "And if I were to be attached to my own views, holding them tight and refusing to let go, others wouldn't like or approve of me."

Resolve: "A mendicant who knows this should give rise to the thought: 'I will not be attached to my own views, holding them tight, but will let them go easily.'"

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The Second Step: Checking by Direct Observation.

After using inference to identify potential blind spots, the next step is to look inward honestly.

The Method

The text instructs a direct self-inquiry: “In such a case, a mendicant should check themselves like this: ‘Do I have corrupt wishes? Have I fallen under the sway of corrupt wishes?’”

This is a direct, non-judgmental inventory. The goal is not to find fault, but to see clearly what is present in one’s own mind and heart.

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The Two Paths After Checking.

The act of checking reveals one of two states, each with a corresponding skillful response.

If a Blemish is Found

‘Suppose that, upon checking, a mendicant knows that they have fallen under the sway of corrupt wishes. Then they should make an effort to give up those bad, unskillful qualities.’
Action: **Effortful Abandonment**.

If No Blemish is Found

‘But suppose that, upon checking, a mendicant knows that they haven’t fallen under the sway of corrupt wishes. Then they should meditate with rapture and joy, training day and night in skillful qualities.’ Action: **Joyful Cultivation**.

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The Polished Mirror of the Mind.

To illustrate this entire process of self-reflection, the sutta offers a powerful and relatable metaphor.

‘Suppose there was a woman or man who was young, youthful, and fond of adornments, and they check their own reflection in a clean bright mirror or a clear bowl of water.’

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How We Use the Mirror.

The metaphor perfectly aligns with the two paths of practice:

If a Blemish is Found:

‘If they see any dirt or blemish there, they’d try to remove it.’

Connection: This is the ‘effort to give up… bad, unskillful qualities.’

If No Blemish is Found:

‘But if they don’t see any dirt or blemish there, they’re happy, thinking: ‘How fortunate that I’m clean!’’

Connection: This is the ‘rapture and joy’ that comes from recognizing and cultivating skillful qualities.’

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The Goal is Not Perfection, but tiydtic withful qualiиis, but Joyful, Skillful Training.

‘Suppose that, upon checking, a mendicant sees that they have given up all these bad, unskillful qualities. Then they should meditate with rapture and joy, training day and night in skillful qualities.’

The measure of admonishment is ultimately a tool for self-liberation. It transforms the often-painful process of receiving feedback into a joyful and continuous practice of cultivating clarity, wisdom, and trust.

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